The Good Books Guide

"The National Book Trust, India,
is in its own way making a powerful
contribution to national integration."

Dr. Manmohan Singh
Prime Minister of India, 2006

The Good Books Guide Criteria for Selecting Children's Books

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This document was developed in a national consultation involving experts from institutions, authors, editors, publishers, librarians, educators and those working to further the interests of children in governmental as well as non-governmental sectors, organized by the National Centre for Children's Literature of the National Book Trust, India, with active involvement of the Publishers' Action Group (PAG-E), at Sonapani (Village Satauli, Near Mukteshwar, Dist. Nainital, Uttarakhand), from 26 to 29 September 2012.

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Creative Learning Series

The Good Books Guide

How To Select A Good Book For Children

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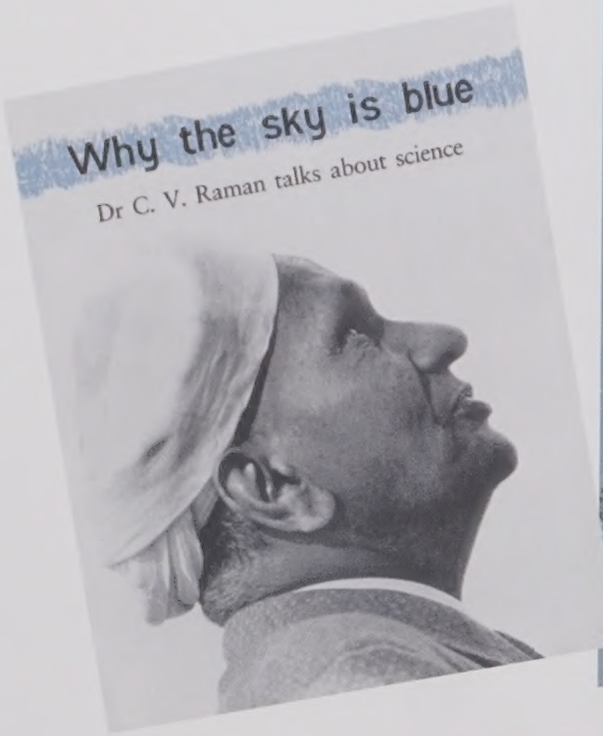
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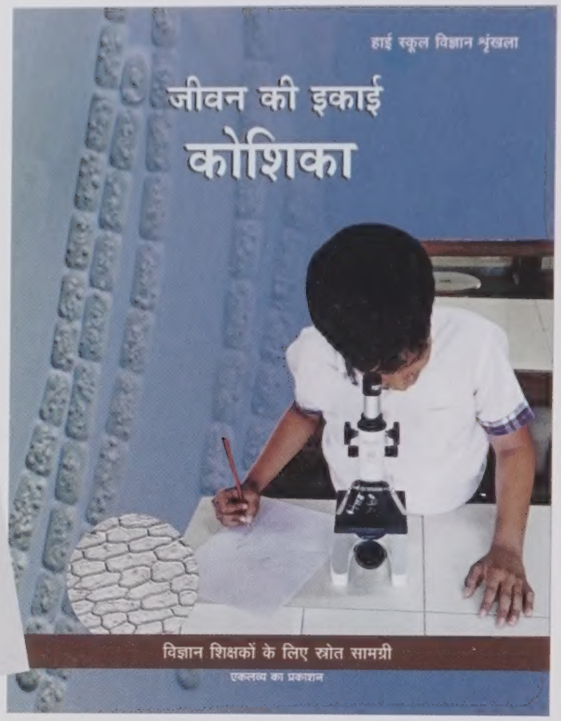
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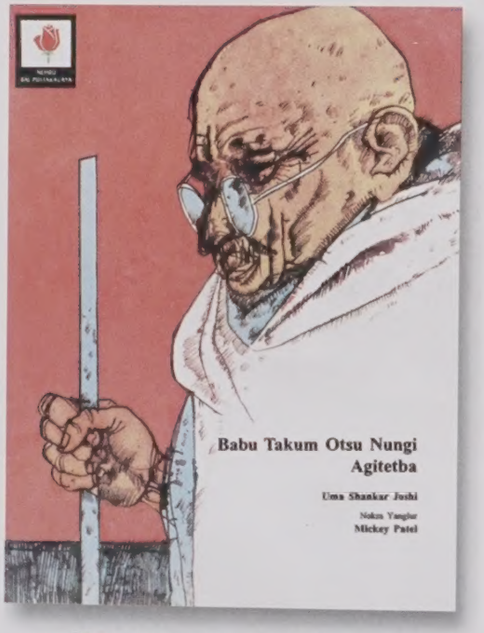
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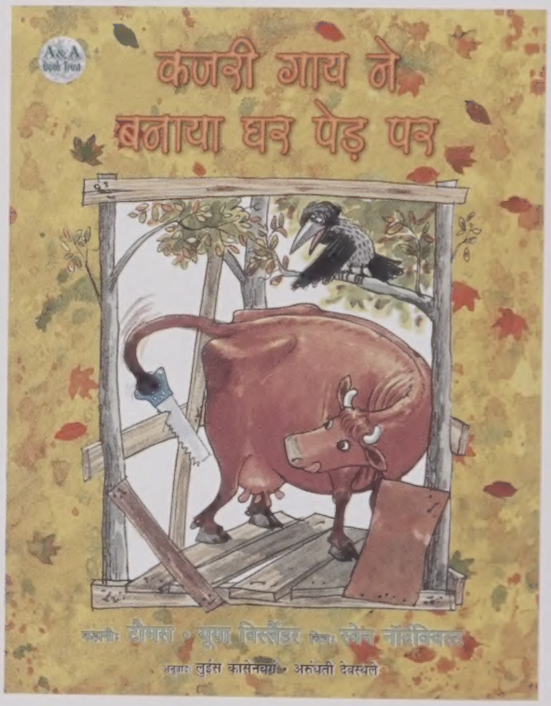
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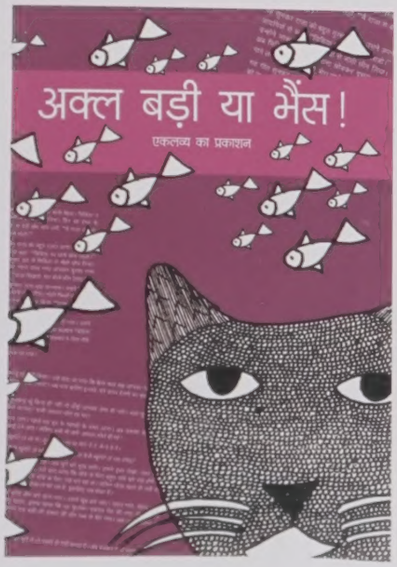
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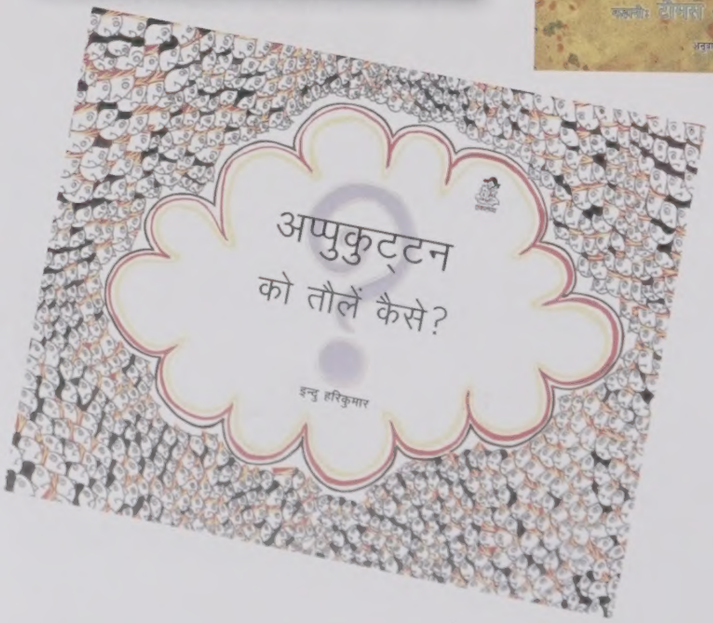
अप्पुकुट्टन
को तौलें कैसे?
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Preface

CHOOSING 'GOOD' BOOKS for children has always been a challenging task. Choosing them on a mass scale is daunting since enormous funds, rules and procedures are involved. One of the consequences of the Right to Education Act of 2009 is that in every state and district, officials in the government educational establishment are required to select books for libraries that are now mandated by law in each of the 13.6 lakh schools. This is a tough task! On what grounds should one book be preferred over another? A multicolour book with big font may still be unsuitable, while another that looks plain, and is only in black and white, may hold fascination for children. Some books seem designed to support children's learning or to get them 'do' things, while others are important because they have something very 'unique' about them.

So, given that only a few hundred titles may be selected from thousands on offer, exactly how is one to choose a good book, year after year after year?

It was to focus on this question that a national consultation involving experts from institutions, authors, editors, publishers, librarians, educators and those working to further the interests of children in governmental as well as non-governmental sectors, was organized by the National Centre for Children's Literature (NCCL) of the National Book Trust, India, with active involvement of the Publishers' Action Group (PAG-E), at Sonapani (Village Satauli, Near Mukteshwar, Dist. Nainital, Uttarakhand), from 26 to 29 September 2012. (The list of participants is at cover-III.) Building on the efforts made earlier, the group came together to address the need identified and develop a contemporary document. Subir Shukla, Principal Coordinator at IGNUS-erg, facilitated the discussion and drafted this report.

The primary objective of this national consultation was to attend to the immediate and urgent need of those – officials, experts and teachers – charged

with the responsibility of procuring books for thousands of schools using limited and precious public resources. The discussion was informed by a consideration of the *likely readers* – in the form of government school children, usually from less privileged sections of society, and with a different kind of exposure than that assumed by many writers. In addition, the curricular framework and the pedagogical requirements – both of which are also mandated in RTE and need to be supported – were also taken into account.

THE ROLE OF A LIBRARY AS ENVISAGED UNDER THE RTE

Before examining the criteria for books to be included in the library, it would be useful to look at the question:

Why does the RTE include a library as a mandatory requirement for every school?

A library is, of course, useful in itself – but in the case of government schools it is even more so. Our children often come from backgrounds where they do not have sufficient educational support at home. Thus one of the first roles of the library is to *help children overcome the disadvantages they face* – by providing them access to plenty of reading and learning material other than the textbooks.

Such access would empower children through exposure, learning, and the holistic development of their personalities. This is why the RTE sees a library as an intrinsic part of the school. The following points elaborate on how a library will further the education of children:

ENABLING AND SUPPORTING THE LEARNING OF READING

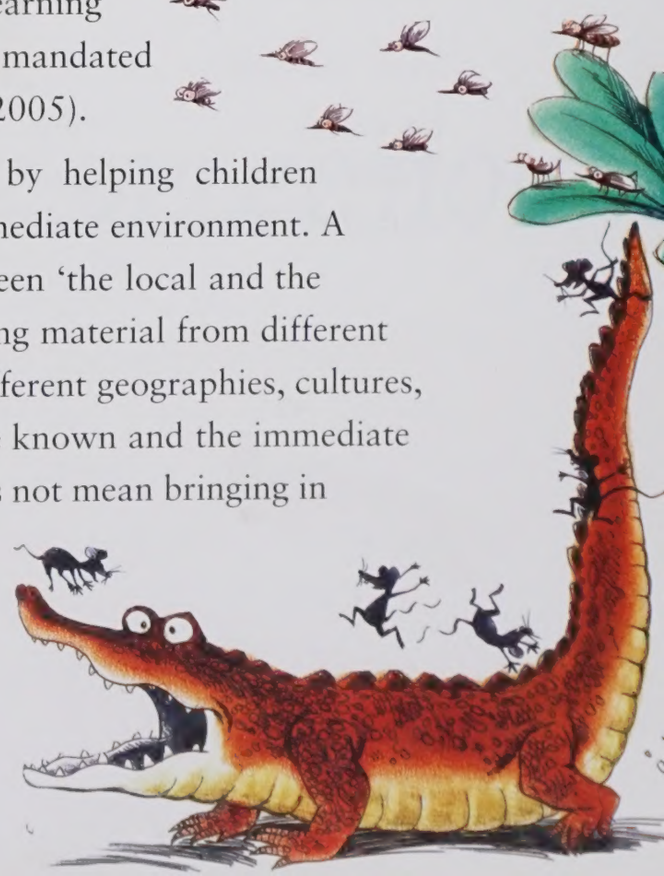
- The development of reading requires more than just the primer and the textbooks. The ability to read grows only if there is exposure to a variety of worthwhile reading material.
- Reading aloud from books is the best way to expose children to the world of books when, at the age of 5 or 6, they join class 1. They have fairly

limited reading ability but their vocabulary, imagination and thinking capacity are significant. Thus, they can enjoy, understand and engage with wide variety of books if these are read aloud to them.

- As children begin independent reading, a library provides the opportunity to connect meaning, sound and shapes, thus enabling children to make the vital breakthrough that sets them on to the road to reading. (At this stage they need material with plenty of pictures and interesting, easy-to-grasp text that incorporates elements such as repetition.)
- Later, as children encounter more and varied material, they become fluent readers and learn to handle different kinds and levels of text. This naturally feeds into their ability to understand other subjects such as science and social sciences. The library thus emerges as a crucial resource towards making quality education possible.

EXPOSURE TO AND CONNECTING WITH THE WIDER WORLD

- Children are full of curiosity, always seeking answers to their numerous questions – many of which can actually be answered through books in the library! By using a library well, a teacher can help children become independent learners, who seek out their own learning and even construct their own understanding (as mandated by the National Curriculum Framework, NCF 2005).
- However, extensive reading goes beyond this by helping children connect with the wider world beyond their immediate environment. A well-selected collection of books balances between 'the local and the global', and exposes children to the finest reading material from different parts of the country and, indeed, the world. Different geographies, cultures, realms of inquiry – and other worlds beyond the known and the immediate – are set open before them. (This of course does not mean bringing in 'general knowledge' type of books about the world beyond one's experience.) Along with that, books stimulate the affective domains,



the world of 'imagining' beyond one's experience so critical to the development of creative processes.

ENABLING ALL-ROUND, HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN

- Finally, a carefully identified set of books can help develop many faculties in children that are emphasized in the curriculum but are difficult to formally work upon in the classroom. As already mentioned, books provide children an opportunity to imagine and fantasize, empathize with the views of those very different from themselves, understand problems and learn to solve them, develop the ability to think and reflect, and become sensitive persons – in other words, well- rounded human beings.

In this manner – by facilitating the learning of reading, providing exposure and enabling all-round growth – a library helps fulfil the basic goal of education. Selection of books – and their use – should naturally be informed by this understanding!

M.A. Sikandar

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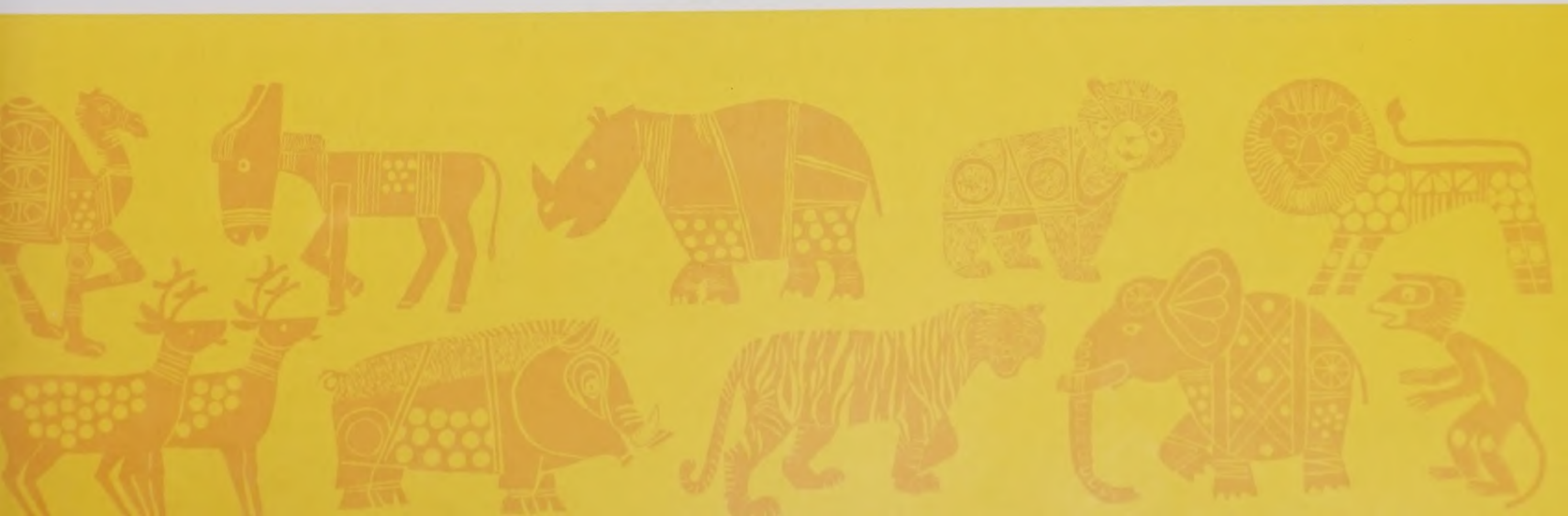
CRITERIA FOR SELECTION



Main Considerations for Selection of Books

Any discussion on how to identify and select a 'good' book leads to literally hundreds of points, but making the correct choice on the basis of numerous factors is almost impossible! Therefore, for selecting books, it seems necessary to apply only a *limited* number of significant considerations, and apply only the most crucial criteria within those.

We followed this approach in the guidelines here as they are intended to be *practical* and *reliable*. The guidelines also take into account the situation of the government schools, the system and the needs of those involved in the selection.

This section informs you of the following main considerations while the subsequent sections detail them out:

- Forms and genres covered
- Avoidables
- Criteria for selection
- Cross-cutting considerations
- Reading levels

These guidelines have been designed to help you select appropriate ***fiction, poetry, and non-fiction*** across reading levels. However, these do not include all the forms and genres, and during the selection process you might also want to look at:

- Picture books without words, and comics
- More descriptive material, activity books, and collections – especially for 11-14 year olds (or Level 3 as indicated ahead)
- Collections of poems, stories, essays for the different levels
- Magazines

Avoidables are the undesirable elements that should disqualify any book from being selected. Since you have to go through hundreds of books in a short time, it might be easier to begin by deciding what to weed out – and this can be done quickly and without much difficulty, following the list of avoidables. These are common-sense points that are easy to spot and it would be best to short-list the books using these before moving on to the criteria for selection.

Five-point criteria for selection were found to be most useful for picking the right books. These criteria need to be applied when the books have been short-listed after weeding out the 'avoidables':

1. Theme, content and the degree of engagement
2. Plot (including characters) and structure
3. Language used
4. Illustrations, design and production
5. Values

These are the *key criteria*, and for any book selected the answer to each of the following questions must be 'Yes' –

1. Are the theme and content child-friendly and will these engage the reader sufficiently?
2. Are the elements of plot (including characters) and structure well designed?
3. Is the language used child-friendly, and is it likely to enhance the pleasure of reading and the child's ability to read and comprehend?
4. Are the illustrations, design and production suitable for the book?
5. Are appropriate (and inclusive) values emphasized, and are these presented in such a way to encourage children to think over them?

You will agree that you need more details and information before you can answer these questions. That's why in Section 2 what these categories include and why they are important is explained. The details to be considered are explained in Chapter 2, along with examples of books that meet the desired criteria – most of these are well-known books and you will be able to see in them the qualities highlighted. Going through these, and applying them to a few books, will help you answer the five questions quickly, without taking much time.

Cross-cutting considerations are those that run across these five categories and include:

- The books should work in the context of the child and should be culturally sensitive without disrespecting any social group.
- At the same time children should not remain limited to their context – they have to be exposed to the best in the world. Many books can be understood by all children cutting across cultures and geographies and they can relate to them comfortably.
- The degree to which a book enables children to make connections is important taking them from the known to the unknown, introducing them to other parts of the world beyond their own in a manner in which they can connect and compare.

These considerations have been embedded in the five key criteria.

Reading levels: Three broad levels have been identified and indicated wherever appropriate. This will help selectors identify appropriate books according to the child's level of reading:

- Level 1: Early Readers – Classes 1 to 3
- Level 2: Fluent Readers – Classes 3 to 5 (Class 3 included here as well)
- Level 3: Advanced Readers – Classes 6 to 8

Note: These are indicative levels and children within these might have different reading levels and preferences.

Key Categories of Criteria - What and Why

Theme, content and the degree of engagement

What the book contains – the theme, the topic and the contents – are obviously the first aspects to be looked at. If the material is such that children cannot understand or relate to it, or find it too easy or boring, the book is clearly not suitable.

The material should appeal to children and attract them and help them make a connection with the book. The themes and contents should be such that let children engage with the book and learn new things, including going beyond their own geographical area. Interesting content triggers children's imagination, and help them relate with a variety of characters and even a whole new world that enlarges their horizons. This goes beyond and helps in the emotional development, enabling children to look at their world with care and concern, generate rich relationships, and encourages them to see from others' point of view, going beyond one's own limited perspective.

What would help children relate with the book easily and increase the degree of engagement? Chapter 2 contains the criteria in detail and answers this question.

Key question 1 that must be answered as 'Yes':

Are the theme and content child-friendly, and will these engage the reader sufficiently?

Plot (including characters) and structure

The manner in which the contents are sequenced and arranged has a very important role to play for the book to make sense, generate curiosity and interest, and 'satisfy' the reader.

In the case of fiction, a clear 'beginning', 'middle', and 'end' help children understand the flow and relate with the book. While the beginning arouses curiosity, the middle part of the book presents twists and turns and generates suspense, and the end then ties everything together in a satisfying manner. The presence of a character that children can identify with interesting dialogue, humour, evocative descriptions and exciting action, all combine to make a book that children love to read again and again.

In the case of non-fiction, it is not merely a list of facts that is desired (as is often the case with 'general knowledge' books). The topic needs to be treated from the children's point of view and its relevance established. The structure is therefore crucial in non-fiction, too, in order to ensure that the reader's curiosity is aroused, with interesting facts presented in a linked manner leading to understanding and insight.

Key question 1 that must be answered as 'Yes':

Are the elements of plot (including characters) and structure well designed?

Language Used

When a child engages with a book, she is learning to make meaning out of all that it contains – the printed words, the pictures, the design, and the various ways in which the writer and illustrator have tried to communicate. The text contains thoughts, feelings and descriptions expressed in words, and the goal is that children should experience the pleasure of recreating these in their minds, being able to think about them, and have their own views.

All this begins when the child actually holds the book in her own hands. We can help children in this journey by providing graded literature suited to their levels which would motivate them to read. To keep things simple, we have graded readers into three categories at present – early readers, fluent readers, and advanced readers.

The guidelines look at the richness and diversity of language used, the degree of innovation and the manner in which the language makes itself 'easy to understand' for the reader at that level.

Key question 1 that must be answered as 'Yes':

Is the language used child friendly and is it likely to enhance the pleasure of reading and the child's ability to read and comprehend?

Illustration, Design and Production

Illustrations are an inseparable element of the books for children and are the first thing that appeals to children. Visually attractive, these help pre-school children 'read' the book even before they learn to read. Once the child begins to read, the illustrations help 'decode' the text, complementing, supplementing and expanding it. In fact, illustrations are critical in enabling the child to enter the world described. Well illustrated and designed books also draw children, making them want to go through them, sowing the seeds of a life-long relationship with books. But, as children grow older and become advanced readers (Level 3), their dependence on illustrations is less and they are able to enjoy a wide variety of books with longer texts.

Production, of course, determines whether the book is affordable (high production quality at low cost being the desired goal), durable, as well as readable.

Key question 1 that must be answered as 'Yes':

Are the illustrations, design and production suitable for the book?

Values

Books have a profound influence on the development of values and morals in children. The kind of world that they portray, what values they reflect and what they get children to think about are the aspects that impact children's development.

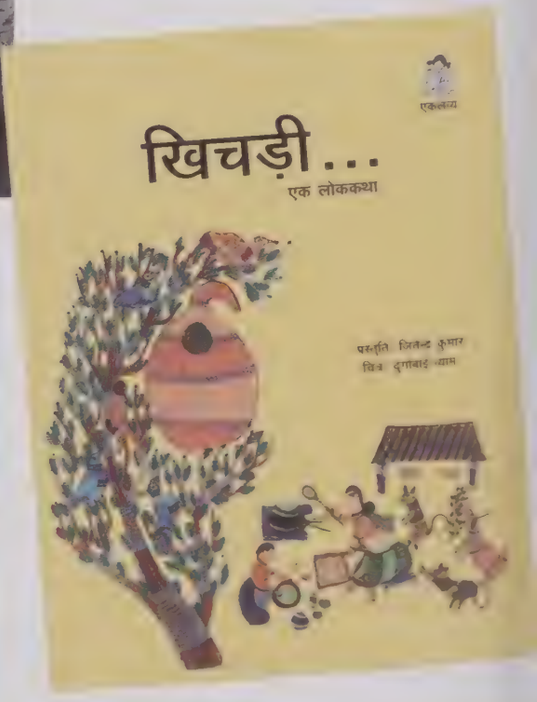
There is a need to realize that many groups – and their world-view and perspectives – are often ignored in children's literature. For instance, girls, tribal or *dalit* children, children with special needs, working children and those living in urban slums, don't get enough representation in mainstream literature. Therefore, it would be important to include books that do incorporate their world and are inclusive in nature. On the other hand, books that display any kind of bias or contain anything against the Indian Constitution should be avoided.

Moral development does not take place simply by being told what is right and wrong, but by being given the opportunity to think about the issue. The collection of books in the library, as a whole, should therefore reflect diversity – different kinds of

environments, peoples, events, issues and points of view. This will help our children develop a sense of right and wrong, along with the ability (and the courage) to take the right decisions when the time comes.

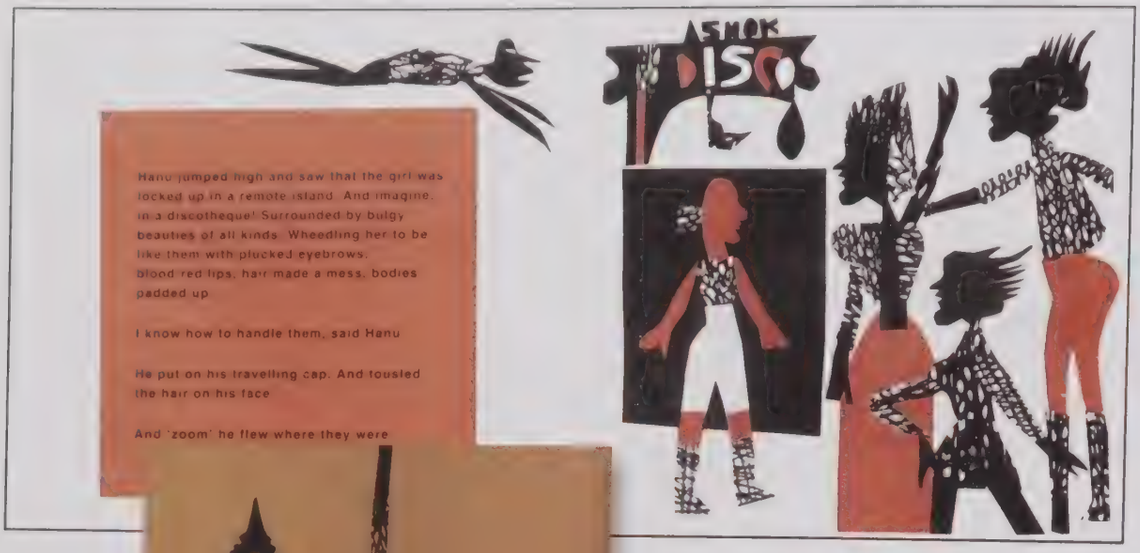
Key question 5 that must be answered as 'Yes':

Are appropriate (and inclusive) values emphasised and are these presented in such a way that would encourage children to think about them?



THE OVERALL COLLECTION

- Sufficient fiction and non-fiction for different age groups with a balance between fantasy and realistic material.
- Variety in the nature of books selected with a range of genres and language usage. The non-fiction should include biographies, travel books, activity books, etc.
- Plays, poetry, information and reference books such as dictionaries, atlases and encyclopedias.
- 'Read-Aloud' books and 'BIG' books for introducing early readers to reading.
- Material for special needs children, e.g. braille books, or audio books can be used with computers and mobile phones, for children with limited sight.
- Some books with positive portrayal of girls, tribal or dalit children, children with special needs and those living in urban slums.


ASHOK
DISCO
Hanu jumped high and saw that the girl was locked up in a remote island. And imagine, in a discotheque! Surrounded by bulgy beauties of all kinds. Wheedling her to be like them with plucked eyebrows, blood red lips, hair made a mess, bodies padded up.
I know how to handle them, said Hanu.
He put on his travelling cap. And tousled the hair on his face.
And 'zoom' he flew where they were.
HOW HANU BECAME HANUMAN

1 TO 10
PROCESSION

SUJATA AND THE WILD ELEPHANT

THE CRITERIA IN DETAIL

How to Use the Criteria

You don't need to go through the entire list given here every time you assess a book. In the beginning, you need to understand each of the sections and sub-sections, and later, you can use the SELECTION TOOL provided. In fact, with practice, you will find that using the list of avoidables to sift through the books, and then asking just the *five key questions* serves the purpose. This is because there are only *three steps* in ensuring reliable yet rapid selection.

↓

STEP 1

Check books against 'avoidables' to weed out the substandard and unsuitable titles.

↓

STEP 2

Use the five key questions to decide whether the shortlisted books are desirable:

- Most of the five key questions must be answered as 'Yes'.
- And for that, most of the points under each question must be answered as 'Yes'.

↓

STEP 3

Finally, examine the desirable books against the criteria for the *three levels* to decide whether the books are appropriate for the level you are making the selection.

The following sections detail these out.

STEP 1 Remove 'avoidable' books

In every selection process, you are faced with thousands of titles when only a few hundred need to be selected. To deal with this, in the first instance, it would be advisable to quickly weed out the substandardand unsuitable books. For this, we present below a list of shortcomings that are unacceptable in children's books. These deficiencies imply that the book is unsuitable for children. Therefore, even if a book has a few of these, it should be rejected.

This will leave you with a much smaller list of shortlisted books to make a proper selection. The sub-points under each avoidable criteria will help you make the right decision.

1 *Do the theme and contents contain any bias? If yes, avoid the book.*

- Discrimination which shows any kind of bias: rural, urban, class, caste, colour, religion.
- Negativity that is glorified: violence, revenge, ridicule, cruelty, stereotyping of community or professions.
- Stereotyping or glorification of any specific group.
- Negative portrayal of gender, class, region, religion, caste, etc. in the illustrations.

2 *Is the plot weak or illogical? If yes, avoid the book.*

- Plot lacks suspense and has a very predictable outcome.
- Illogical events or sequence that make comprehension difficult or is inapproprite for the age group.
- Stereotyped characterizations or unrealistic dialogue.

3 *Is the language used inappropriate for children? If yes, avoid the book.*

- More emphasis given to 'purity' of language rather than comprehensibility.
- Artificial and stiff language, rather than language that has a 'flow'.
- Language that is not engaging or tends to be boring.
- Mismatch in the levels of the reader and the language used.

4 *Is the typescript and type-size inappropriate, and the illustrations and design unsuitable or of poor quality? If yes, avoid the book.*

- Typescript should be reader-friendly; type-size should neither be too small, nor unnecessarily very large.
- Illustrations / photographs should not be static, crowded, crude or gory.
- They should not be inconsistent with regard to the size, proportion, placement or colours.
- There should be no overlapping of the text and illustrations / ground colour that compromises with the legibility.
- Text should fit-in within the inner pages, not flowing over to the covers.

5 *Are there major faults with the production? If yes, avoid the book.*

- The printing of the text and illustrations should not be smudged, diffused, or uneven.
- The trimming of the book should not be crooked, cutting into the margins.
- In saddle-stitched books, the pins should be well-placed at the fold, and should not stick out so as to hurt the young reader.

6 *Does the book preach morals without giving the child a chance to think?*

- Books that have a 'moral of the story' overtly stated should be avoided.
- Books that 'preach' in an overt fashion should also be avoided. This is because moral development is a complex process. Children learn through observation, experience, reflection, and not by being 'told'.
- The books have to give the child an opportunity to question, enquire and learn.

7 *Does the book misrepresent or look down upon marginalized groups?*

- Avoid books that deal with characters or settings from the marginalized communities in a patronizing, superficial manner. Such books end up reinforcing stereotypes and invokes pity rather than empathy and an awareness of the larger issues involved.

AT A GLANCE

Look at this summary and check yourself for clarity; if not, go back to the details above. This will help you use these criteria more fluently later when the actual selection work has to be done.

Avoid a book if you find yourself answering 'Yes' to any of the following:

- Does the theme and contents contain any bias?
- Is the plot weak or illogical?
- Is the language used inappropriate for children?
- Is the typescript and type-size inappropriate, and the illustrations and design unsuitable or of poor quality?
- Are there major faults with the production?
- Does the book preach morals without giving the child a chance to think?
- Does the book misrepresent or look down upon marginalized groups?

STEP 2 Identify 'desirable' books

The five key criteria mentioned below should now be used to decide whether a book is fit to be included in your library collection. The sub- sections here would help you understand the key questions in some detail.

1 Theme, Content and the Degree of Engagement

> Key question 1 that must be answered as 'Yes':
>
> *Are the theme and content child-friendly, and will these engage the reader sufficiently?*

The following will help you answer this question:

1. *Can the children in your region relate with the book?*

- Does it connect with the level of awareness that the children have?
- Do children relate to it immediately?
- Does it have local relevance along with universal appeal, i.e. is it a theme that can be understood by children in other places as well?

Note: Local relevance / context should not be interpreted in a narrow way. If a good book deals with authentic childhood experience in an engaging way, children from multiple backgrounds can relate to it. Example: Idgah by Premchand.

2. *Does the book stimulate curiosity and engagement?*

- Does it arouse curiosity in the reader and sustain it for most part?
- Does it tell something new to children?
- Does it trigger imagination?
- Will it make children readily laugh? Does it contain a sense of fun?
- Does it contain adventure, a spirit of discovery, or an element of wonder and surprise of finding something new?
- Does it encourage a spirit of inquiry?

3. *Does the book generate emotional engagement in the reader?*

- Does it arouse sensitivity, care and concern about their immediate surroundings (friends, animals, family, nature, environment)? Or even beyond the immediate environment?
- Does it have aspects related to emotional bonding with the family and friends?

Some examples of books that meet these criteria: Premchand's *Idgah*, *The Talkative Tortoise*, *Kajari Gai* series of picture books, *Pehalwan ji*, *Khichdi*, *Pippi Lambemoze* (picture book), *Mahagiri*, *Bonu aur Salim*, *Beej – the Seed*, *Amma – Sab ki Pyari Amma*, *Kabuliwala*, *Kitni Pyari Hai Ye Duniya*.

NON-FICTION

While the above criteria would apply to all books, in the case of non-fiction, you should also check the following:

1. *Is it correct and factual?*
2. *Does it have elements in the text as well as visuals that make it interesting as well as easy to understand?*

- engaging illustrations or photos that give visual support to the text
- information in small chunks and not overloaded with information or jargon
- information conveyed in different formats like drama, travelogue, etc avoiding contrived presentation through a story which is neither fiction nor non-fiction.

AT A GLANCE

Look at this summary and check yourself for clarity; if not, go back to the details above. This will help you use these criteria more fluently later, when the *actual* selection work has to be done. Are the theme and content child-friendly, and will these engage the reader sufficiently?

- Can the children in your region relate with the book?
- Does the book stimulate curiosity and engagement?
- Does the book generate emotional engagement in the reader?

NON-FICTION

- Is it correct and factual?
- Is it supported by means that make it interesting as well as easy to understand?

2 Plot and Structure

Key question 2 that must be answered as 'Yes':

Are the elements of plot (including characters) and structure well designed?

1. *Is there a clear plot structure and has it been well-utilized?*

- Does the plot generate pleasure, involvement and encourage thinking about issues?
- Does the beginning generate curiosity, and introduce characters and the main issue?
- Does the middle bring in greater suspense? Does it lead to a climax?
- Does the end provide a satisfying resolution?
- Is there a logical sequence in the plot?

2. *Are there devices that make the reader identify with the book and enhance their interest?*

- Are the characters interesting to the reader? Are they lively, and can the reader connect with them?
- Are the characters credible? Does the main character achieve his or her goal through own efforts?
- Have humour, evocative descriptions and / or exciting action been used?

3. *If the book is non-fiction, is it structured so as to enable involvement and understanding?* (In non-fiction too there is a 'plot' in the sense of a structure.)

- Does the non-fiction text generate curiosity?
- Is there a sequence which provides a flow that makes the reader turn the page?

AT A GLANCE

Look at this summary and check yourself for clarity; if not, go back to the details above. This will help you use these criteria more fluently later, when the *actual* selection work has to be done.

Are the elements of plot (including characters) and structure well designed?

- Is there a clear plot structure and has it been well-utilized?
- Are there devices that make the reader identify with the book and enhance their interest?
- If the book is non-fiction, is it structured so as to enable involvement and understanding?

3 Language Used in the Book

Key question 3 that must be answered as 'Yes':

Is the language used child-friendly, and is it likely to enhance the pleasure of reading and the child's ability to read and comprehend?

1. *Does the* language *used make the book really* interesting *for the reader?*

- Does the use of language feel natural? Does it have a flow? Does it feel communicative?
- Is there newness / freshness of expression, usage, of 'telling' of the story? Is there innovative use of the language?

2. *Is the language used likely to help develop the child's language, expand her vocabulary?*

- Does the language expand the child's vocabulary?
  - Does it give new words in context?
  - Does it relate pictures with the words?
  - Does it give word meanings?
  - Does it make it possible for the reader to understand new words on her own?
- Are higher literary devices such as idioms and metaphors used?

- Does the language – occasionally – include local words? (This can enrich the language; please don't remove a book on the ground that it doesn't have standard language.)

3. *If the book is meant for those learning to read, is it designed to enable learning of reading?*

This is one of the more difficult things to assess! To find out if this is the case, look at the following. If some or more of these are visible, the answer would be 'Yes'.

- Children learning to read, need a lot of cues and support to help them *successfully predict / guess* what is printed. The pictures used, a degree of repetition, familiar vocabulary, use of new words in such a way that the familiar words help understand them – are some of the means used to enable the learning of reading.
- Natural and short sentences, which cannot be further broken down into smaller meaningful units, with minimum use of punctuation signs, help greatly.
- Repetition is good, at various linguistic levels – word and phrase levels, at the consonant-vowel combination.

4. *If the book is meant for early readers (Classes 1 to 3) does it take into account their level and needs?*

- Is the vocabulary age- and/or level-appropriate? E.g. are the longer words supported by illustrations to enable guessing?
- Are the sentences short and simple?
- Is the grammatical construction simple?
- Does the language flow naturally?
- Is there repetition of words, structures, sentences?
- Is there word play, rhyming, or sound play?
- If the book is in the second language (such as English), are the verbs in present tense?

5. *If the book is meant for fluent readers (Classes 3 to 5) has it been designed to enable them to reach the next level in their reading?*

- Does the book have more robust vocabulary? Are the new words introduced related in some ways with the words they already know (e.g. synonyms)?
- Has care been taken to ensure that not too many ideas or new things are

introduced all at once? That is, the idea density (ratio of concepts to words) is something that readers of this level will be able to manage.

- Does the complexity of the plot match the language supporting it?
- Does the book challenge the reader through the use of higher literacy devices (e.g. idiom), or does it make interesting use of language where there's a gap between apparent meaning and actual meaning? Will the reader experience the beauty of language on reading the book?

A very good example of such qualities is *Sahaj Paath* of Rabindranath Tagore.

If the book is meant for advanced readers (Classes 6 to 8), has it been designed to expand their language awareness and usage?

Many of the earlier points would apply here as well, though of course at a level that is more advanced.

- Is the language natural, does it have flow, and is it communicative?

  Is there newness of expression, of usage, of 'telling' of the story? Is there innovative use of the language?
- Is there a possibility of expanding the child's vocabulary (through means mentioned earlier)?
- Have higher literary devices, including idioms, similes and metaphors been used?
- Once again, if a few local words (common in the region) have been used, please don't remove the book on the ground that it does not have 'standard' language.

NON-FICTION

- Is the vocabulary according to the theme and content?
- Are new concepts explained in a way that the intended reader can understand?
- Are new concepts and ideas introduced gradually and in a logical sequence?

Along with fantasy, one form that is very valuable for young children has to do with humorous word-play and 'whimsy' – often described as 'nonsense'. This does not mean nonsense in the usual sense. Instead, it refers to a specific way of writing that stretches both meaning and language, and is very, very vital for children! If you come across a book that has deliberately been written in this style, please do value it.

Some examples of books with excellent language usage:

Early readers: *Naav Chali, Billi ke Bachche, Roopa Hathi, Mita aur Uske Jadui Joote, Tota.*

Fluent readers: *Mahagiri,* Safdar Hasmi's *Duniya Sabki* and other poems, Vinod Kumar Shukla's *Chhapparvali Jhopadi, Bauna Pahad,* Prayag Shukla's collection of poems *Dhoop Khili.*

AT A GLANCE

Look at this summary and check yourself for clarity; if not, go back to the details above. This will help you use these criteria more fluently later, when the actual selection work has to be done.

Is the language used child-friendly, and is it likely to enhance the pleasure of reading and the child's ability to read and comprehend?

- Is the language used such that makes the book really interesting for the reader?
- Is the language used likely to help develop the child's language, expand her vocabulary?
- If the book is meant for:

  BEGINNER READERS - is it designed to enable learning of reading?

  EARLY READERS (Classes 1 to 3) - does it take into account their level and needs?

  FLUENT READERS (Classes 3 to 5) - is it designed to enable them to reach the next level in their reading?

  ADVANCED READERS (Classes 6 to 8) - has it been designed to expand their language awareness and usage?

4 Illustrations, Design and Production

Key question 4 that must be answered as 'Yes':

Are the illustrations, design and production suitable for the book?

1. *Is the book well-illustrated and designed?*

- Books in picture book format: Do these have illustrations, preferably in colour?
- Are the illustrations detailed, imaginative and relevant to the text, complementing, supplementing and enlarging it?
- Is there a proper balance between the text and illustrations, with the illustrations placed in such a manner so as not to disturb the flow of the text?
- Does the page also provide visual relief, with white space or light/pastel colours?
- Chapter books: Do these have at least one line drawing / sketch in each chapter?

Examples: *Kajari Gai* series of picture books, *Why-Why Girl*, *Lali aur Usaka Ghoda*, *Gaon ka Bachcha*, *Adiyal Gaya*, *Rangon se Mujhe Pyar Hai*, *Mangu ka Lattu*, *Rang hi Rang*.

2. *Are the illustrations for* non-fiction *books* authentic *and* supportive?

- Books for information and knowledge (on sports, science, etc., and books of knowledge and encyclopedias) must have illustrations, photographs, sketches and / or diagrams that are authentic and accurate support to the text.

Examples: *Time-to-Discover* readers, *Usborne First Encyclopedias*

3. *Are the typescript, type-size, setting and layout of the text appealing and reader friendly?*

- Are the typescript and the type-size appropriate for the young readers, and the theme / content?
- Does the text have sufficient inter-word and inter-sentence spaces?

4 *Are the paper / card / board of the required quality and GSM?*

Paper for illustrated books (minimum for reasonable production):

- Inner pages, 80gsm white paper / 90gsm art paper, no see-through.
- Card cover, 220-250gsm coated board or art card.
- Thermal lamination – matt or gloss – on the card cover.

5 *Is the binding strong and appropriate?*

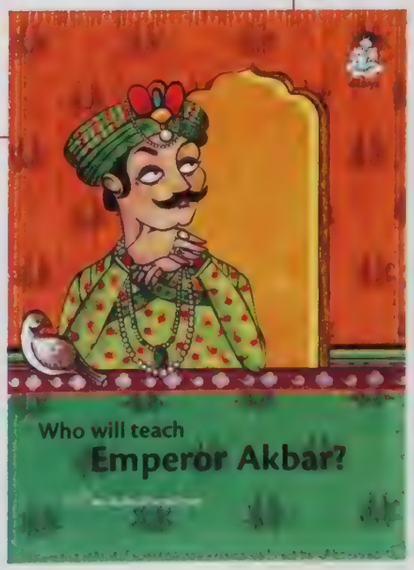
- Binding:
  - Below 64 pgs, saddle-stitched, 2 staples
  - Over 64 pgs, central-stitched, and perfect binding
- Reference books such as dictionaries and encyclopedias may have hardback binding with board and paper paster.

AT A GLANCE

Look at this summary and check yourself for clarity; if not, go back to the details above. This will help you use these criteria more fluently later, when the actual selection work has to be done.

Are the illustrations, design and production suitable for the book?

- Is the book well-illustrated?
- Are the illustrations for non-fiction books authentic and supportive?
- Are the typescript, type-size, setting and layout of the text appealing and reader-friendly?
- Are the paper / card / board of the required quality and GSM?
- Is the binding appropriate and strong?



5 Values

Key questions that must be answered as 'Yes'

Are appropriate (and inclusive) values emphasized, and are these presented in such a way that would encourage children to think over them?

1. *Does the book encourage a child to think, question, discover, examine values, assumptions for themselves?*

   Examples: *Roopa Haathi, Chintu ki Topi*

2. *Does the book handle the issues involved in a sensitive manner?*

   - Does it deal with difficult themes (e.g. death or conflict) in a sensitive manner, from a child's perspective?

     Examples: *Emperor Akbar, Aditi ki Sahas Kathaen, Panchhi Pyara, Mukund and Riaz, Barasta Tarbooj*

   - Does the book recognize struggle and dilemma children go through as part of their growing up, and development of the sense of right and wrong?
     (Books which recognize temptation, greed, jealousy and struggle children go through are likely to be far more impactful than books that tell children that being greedy is bad.)

     Examples: *Apni Apni Pasand, Amma Pyari Amma, Juee Masi ki Beti, Sweetest Mango*

3. *Does the book deal with the marginalized communities in authentic, non-patronizing and non-stereotypical manner?*

   - Does the book question / challenge stereotypes that are disempowering for the marginalized communities? Is stereotyping of roles, communities, relationships avoided or challenged in an engaging way? Does the book help a child see things from multiple perspectives, some which challenge conventional beliefs?

     Examples: *Bonu aur Salim, Sorry Best Friend, Bhimayana, Pippi, Pappa ki Mu,*

Few from *Girlstar* series, *Ten, Why Are You Afraid to Hold My Hand?, Hamare Samaya me Shram ki Garima*

- *Does the book reflect authentic, lived reality of children from diverse backgrounds?*

  These children are present in government schools even though curriculum and children's literature does not always reflect their presence. We do need to include such books as they can be a powerful tool to help children understand the experiences of others very different from themselves, to relate to the plurality around them, and learn that there isn't only *one* kind of child and childhood that may be seen as being normal and desirable.

  Examples: *Barish ka Ek Din, I Am a Cat, Tilling the Pot, My Friend the Sea, Ju's Story*

AT A GLANCE

Look at this summary and check yourself for clarity; if not, go back to the details above. This will help you use these criteria more fluently later, when the actual selection work has to be done.

Are appropriate (and inclusive) values emphasized, and are these presented in such a way that would encourage children to think over them?

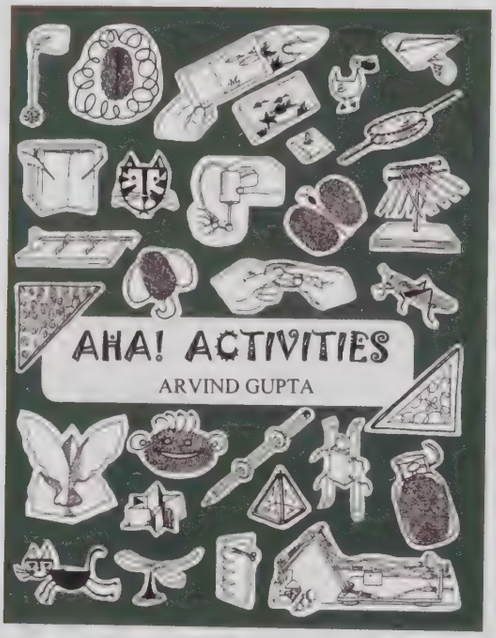
- Does the book encourage a child to think, question, discover, examine values, assumptions for themselves?
- Does the book handle the issues involved in a sensitive manner?
- Does the book deal with the marginalized communities in authentic, non-patronizing and non-stereotypical manner?

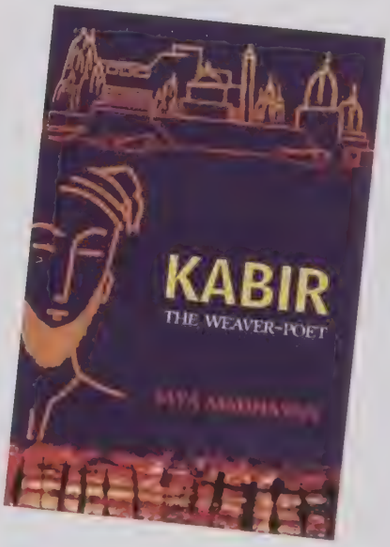
STEP 3 Select according to the level

Now that you have shortlisted the desirable books, the final step is to see if they are appropriate for the level they are intended. The following section points out the differences between the three levels for which you will be selecting.

Key question that must be answered as 'Yes':

Is the book appropriate for the level for which it is being selected?





1 Theme, Content and the Degree of Engagement

- The themes suggested below are illustrative, and by no means exhaustive.
- With levels, the themes may not change, but would get broader.
- Coverage will go on widening with level, starting from close to home and immediate environment.
- The depth of treatment and complexity, too, would change.

Note: Activity books are not workbooks, but those that suggest activities to be done (e.g. experiments, origami, etc.)

LEVEL 1 – Classes 1 to 3	LEVEL 2 – Classes 3 to 5	LEVEL 3 – Classes 6 to 8
Activity books • Animal stories • Stories around the family, home, community **Rhyme & rhythm based poetry** **Picture books** • Themes around self, home, family • Familiar themes of comfort • Stories that can be 'told' • Myths, simple fantasies • Rhyme and Rhythm • Stories with themes of care, affection • About animals, nature • Which respond to their curiosity • Song books **Non-fiction** • About sun, moon, stars, mountains • Environment • Simple plays, based on small stories • Stories with role play • Funny books	**Activity books** **Descriptive poetry** Stories which encourage reflection; themes spread out in expanding circles. **Picture books** • Relationships • Humour • Adventure and Mystery • Stories based on real life with greater complexity • Historical stories • Stories about places **Non-fiction** • About cultural heritage • Dictionaries for self-use • Atlases • Reference material to begin project work	Chapter books on more challenging and diverse issues; raising questions, inviting enquiry. **Themes:** • Adolescence, gender, sexuality • Conflict and resolution • Friendship • Humour • Nature • Emotional turmoil • Ghosts • Heroes • Suspense *The focus on emotional engagement would change from the family to friends.* **Non-fiction** • Reference books and related books to enhance and enrich curriculum • Biographies • Travel • Adventure • Environment

2 Plot and Structure

LEVEL 1 – Classes 1 to 3	LEVEL 2 – Classes 3 to 5	LEVEL 3 – Classes 6 to 8
Basic characters from immediate surroundings, fantasy, animal characters Simple, single incident plots related to self- experience	Children as characters Greater complexity Other issues / concerns woven in More real life and adventure going beyond the family	More than one sub-plot possible Larger number of characters, more varied More plot devices used (e.g. foreshadowing, twists) Open ended, more ambiguous or gray May have many locations, time zones, greater spread over geography and time.

3 Language Used

LEVEL 1 – Classes 1 to 3	LEVEL 2 – Classes 3 to 5	LEVEL 3 – Classes 6 to 8
Must have • age- / level-appropriate vocabulary • longer words supported by illustrations to enable guessing • short and simple sentences • simple grammatical construction • natural language flow • repetition of words, structures, sentences • word play, rhyming, sound play	Must have • language natural, with flow, communicative • use of idioms, metaphors (higher literary devices) • possibility of expanding the child's vocabulary • newness of expression, usage, 'telling' of the story, innovative use of the language Desirable to accommodate local / child's own words Books in English, the verbs should be in present tense.	Must have • language natural, with flow, communicative • use of idioms, metaphors (higher literary devices) • possibility of expanding the child's vocabulary • newness of expression, usage, 'telling' of the story, innovative use of the language Desirable to accommodate local / child's own words The collection of books should expose readers to a nuanced language usage through a wide range of forms and genres.

LEVELS 2 & 3 NON-FICTION

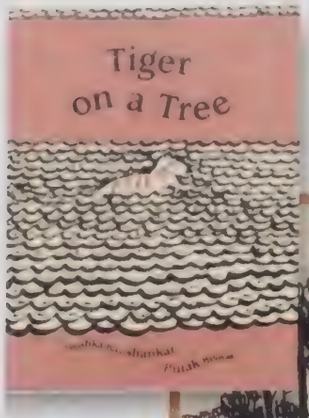
- The vocabulary should be according to the theme and content.
- New concepts should be explained in a way that the intended reader can understand.
- New concepts and ideas should be introduced gradually and in a logical sequence.

4 Illustrations, Design and Production

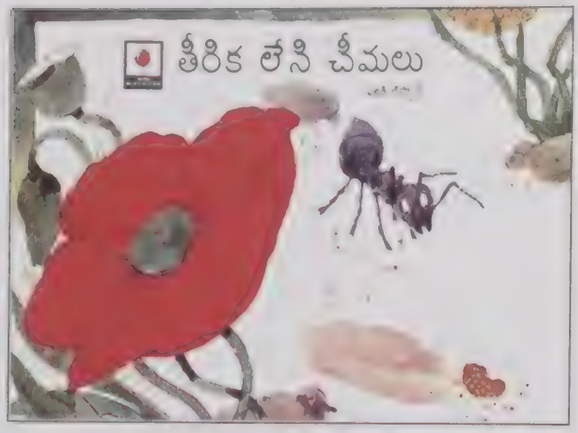
LEVEL 1 – Classes 1 to 3	LEVEL 2 – Classes 3 to 5	LEVEL 3 – Classes 6 to 8
Illustrations should occupy 75% or more of the space	Illustrations should occupy 60% or more of the space	Limited illustration required as grown up children find too much of it childish.
Type size: English 16pts / Hindi 18pts, or more	Type size: English 14pts / Hindi 16pts, or more	Type size: English 12pts / Hindi 14pts, or more
Number of pages: - Picture books Min. 12pp / Max. 32pp + Cover	Number of pages: • Picture books Min. 24pp / Max. 64pp + Cover	Not possible to specify the number of pages as children at this age read just about anything.
Examples: *Rangon se Mujhe Pyar Hai*, *"Time-to-Discover"* series	• Chapter books Min. 48pp / Max. 96pp + Cover Examples: *The Mystery of Blue*, *Ayesha*	Examples: *Harry Potter*, *Vritton ki Duniya*, *Tasviron me Gandhi*, *Narmada*, *My Facebook Friends*

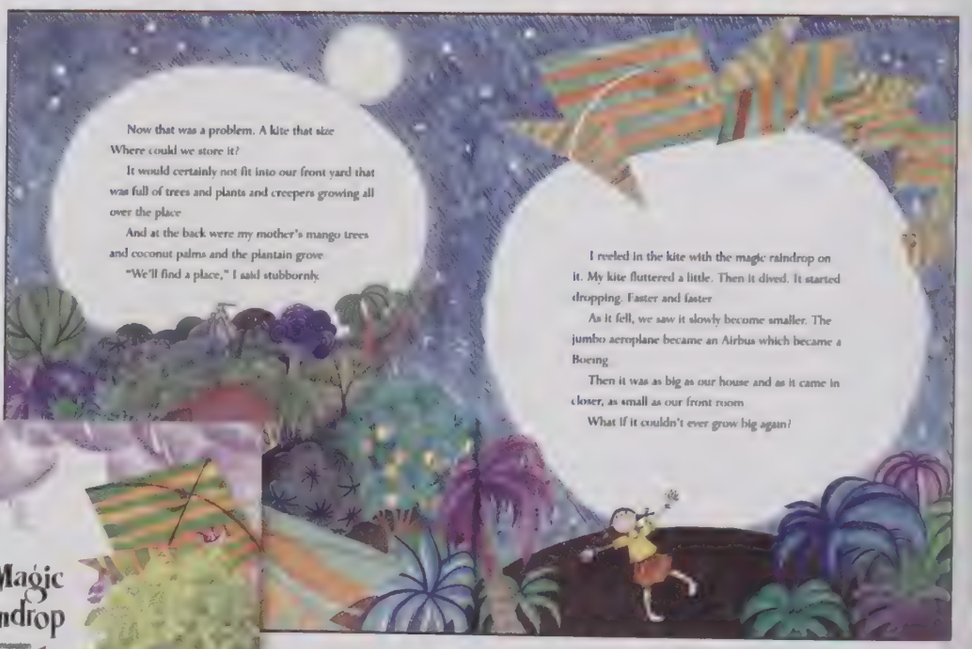
5 Values

Levels are not indicated – values may be considered to be embedded in the aspects above. At no age books which are attempting to teach or preach values are desirable. More complex treatment of values is more suitable for older children.


Tiger
on a Tree

Does he want to go across?
Make a dash?
Be bold? Be rash?


తీరిక లేని చీమలు


Now that was a problem. A kite that size
Where could we store it?
It would certainly not fit into our front yard that was full of trees and plants and creepers growing all over the place
And at the back were my mother's mango trees and coconut palms and the plantain grove
"We'll find a place," I said stubbornly.
I reeled in the kite with the magic raindrop on it. My kite fluttered a little. Then it dived. It started dropping. Faster and faster
As it fell, we saw it slowly become smaller. The jumbo aeroplane became an Airbus which became a Boeing
Then it was as big as our house and as it came in closer, as small as our front room
What if it couldn't ever grow big again?

पीटर वान आऊधस्टेन
स्टीफानी डि ग्राफ
आरक्षण

The Magic Raindrop

A CBT PUBLICATION
SONALI'S FRIEND

SELECTION AT A GLANCE

SELECTION TOOL

STEP 1 Remove 'avoidable' books

Avoid a book if you find yourself answering 'Yes' to any of the following:

- Do the theme and contents contain any bias?
- Is the plot weak or illogical?
- Is the language used inappropriate for children?
- Are the typescript and type-size inappropriate, and the illustrations and design unsuitable or of poor quality?
- Are there major faults with the production?
- Does the book preach morals without giving the child a chance to think?
- Does the book misrepresent or look down upon marginalized groups?

STEP 2 Identify 'desirable' books

1 Theme, Content and the Degree of Engagement

Are the theme and content child-friendly, and will these engage the reader sufficiently?

- Can the children in your region relate with the book?
- Does the book stimulate curiosity and engagement?
- Does the book generate emotional engagement in the reader?

NON-FICTION

- Is it correct and factual?
- Is it supported by means that make it interesting as well as easy to understand?

2 Plot and Structure

Are the elements of plot (including characters) and structure well designed?

- Is there a clear plot structure and has it been well-utilized?
- Are there devices that make the reader identify with the book and enhance their interest?
- If the book is non-fiction, is it structured so as to enable involvement and understanding?

3 Language Used in the Book

Is the language used child-friendly, and is it likely to enhance the pleasure of reading and the child's ability to read and comprehend?

- Is the language used such that makes the book really interesting for the reader?
- Is the language used likely to help develop the child's language, expand her vocabulary?
- If the book is meant for:

  BEGINNER READERS - is it designed to enable learning of reading?

  EARLY READERS (Classes 1 to 3) - does it take into account their level and needs?

  FLUENT READERS (Classes 3 to 5) - is it designed to enable them to reach the next level in their reading?

  ADVANCED READERS (Classes 6 to 8) - has it been designed to expand their language awareness and usage?

4 Illustrations, Design and Production

Are the illustrations, design and production suitable for the book?

- Is the book well-illustrated?
- Are the illustrations for non-fiction books authentic and supportive?
- Are the typescript, type-size, setting and layout of the text appealing and reader-friendly?
- Are the paper / card / board of the required quality and GSM?
- Is the binding appropriate and strong?

5 Values

Are appropriate (and inclusive) values emphasized, and are these presented in such a way that would encourage children to think over them?

- Does the book encourage a child to think, question, discover, examine values, assumptions for themselves?
- Does the book handle the issues involved in a sensitive manner?
- Does the book deal with the marginalized communities in authentic, non-patronizing and non-stereotypical manner?

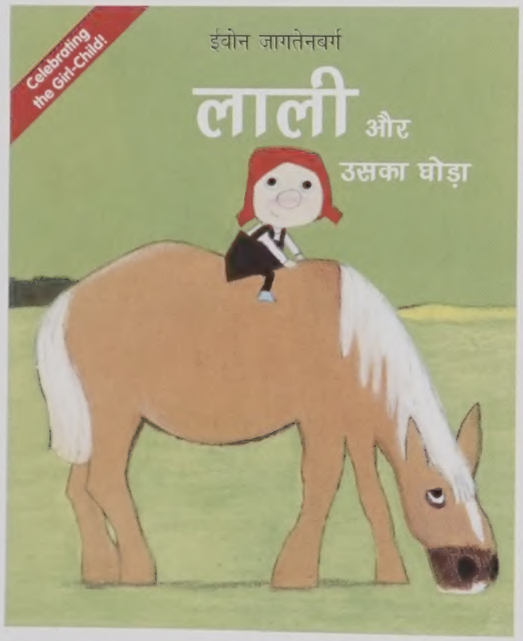
STEP 3 Select according to the level

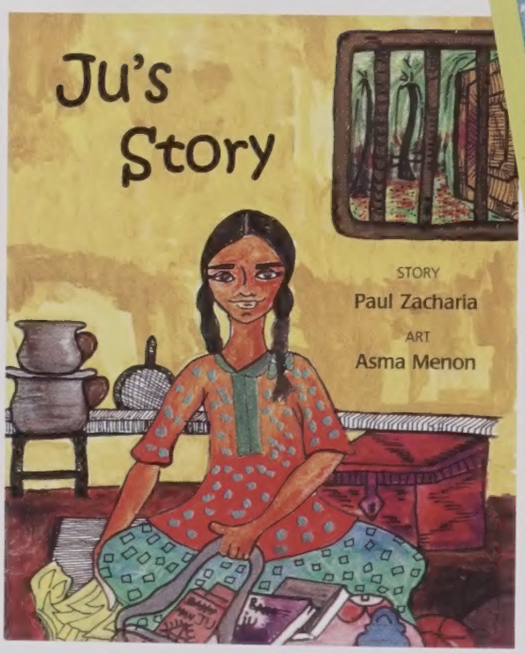
Key question that must be answered as 'Yes':

Is the book appropriate for the level for which it is being selected?

Refer to the tables on pages 33, 34 and 35 under the following sub-heads:

- Theme, content and degree of engagement
- Plot and Structure
- Language used
- Illustration. Design and Production
- Values





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National Consultation workshop organized by the National Book Trust, India, with active involvement of the Publishers' Action Group (PAG-E), at Sonapani (Village Satauli, Near Mukteshwar, Dist. Nainital, Uttarakhand), from 26 to 29 September 2012.

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With the publishing scenario for children's books having changed dramatically over the last few years, there is a wide and diverse range of books now available. This makes selecting books for libraries a daunting task. Further, the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 mandates that every government school in every district of every state across the country has to select and buy books for libraries each year. **THE GOOD BOOKS GUIDE** offers key criteria for selecting the best children's books from among the hundreds on offer, based particularly on the requirements of such a mass scale selection procedure. Librarians and teachers from all schools, government and non-government as well as private institutions, will find useful guidelines from this draft report / document as to how to identify the ideal one for the target group. A good book is a good book!

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